DECORATION & FURNITURE

PRACTICAL WOOD-CARVING FOR AMATEURS.

III.

AFTER the pupil has carved the design given in the previous paper, the tools used will begin to be dull. They must be sharpened at once. The sharpening of tools requires so much skill, time and strength, that it is generally best to send them to a shop. If you prefer to sharpen your own tools, get a hard fine oil stone. Drop some oil on the stone, hold a chisel flat on the bevel, and be careful to keep it so. If you turn the edge of the tool, getting what is called a wire edge, turn the tool over and rub it on the other side. If a tool is broken or nicked and ragged from work or bad handling, send it to a shop, and have it ground down to a straight edge. To sharpen a gouge, rub it on the outside, turning it constantly, to keep the curve of the tool. Hold it pretty flat on the stone; otherwise you will be liable to turn the edge. If you do turn the edge, take a small oil stone, called a "slip stone," cut to a thin edge on one side, and with this sharpen the gouge on the inside. An oil stone of this kind with one edge sharp enough to fit the acute angle of the V tool can be bought, but this will not often be necessary if the tool is properly handled.

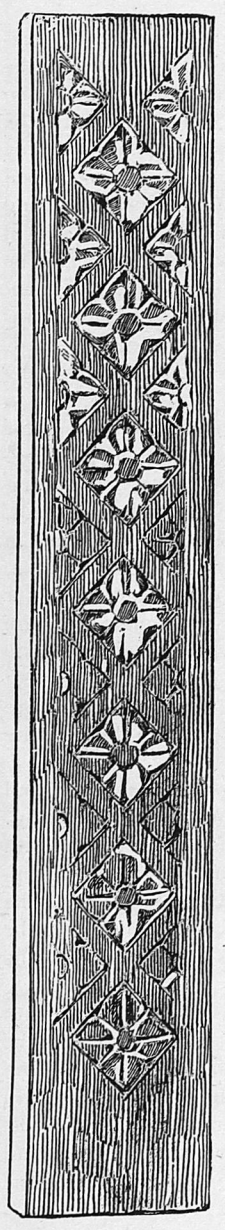


FIG. 3.

For a second lesson take the design shown in Fig. 3, in which the conventionalized flower forms require slight modelling. Draw the design on the wood very carefully, the great beauty of a conventional design consisting in its absolute accuracy. If you do not draw well enough to put in the figures in freehand, cut the shape in stiff paper, and use it. In this design get the centre of the diamond, and holding the medium gouge straight, and turning it once, cut the "boss" in the centre of the figure. Outline the petals with the flat gouge, setting the tool at the point where petals join, and cutting to the outside point. The width and the sweep of the tool with a little handling will give the outline required. With the chisel bevel around the edges deep enough to get an effect of light and shade. Make the straight cut indicated in the middle of each petal, with the V tool, cutting toward the boss, and making the cut deepest at the centre. Model the flower with one cut on each half petal with the medium gouge. Round slightly the sharp edges of the boss in the centre. For this design draw the diamonds two inches square and the plain bands half an inch wide. A conventional design of this kind, drawn on a smaller scale, is often used in background or "all-over" work. Whole panels of it are very effective—for instance, the front of a drawer in a table, or the side panels of a cabinet where the more conspicuous panels are done in natural designs. The two designs I have given would be equally suitable for horizontal or for upright borders. There are other conventional designs which would be suitable only for upright panels—as those conventionalized from leaf forms in which the growth of the plant is still indicated. Notice them carefully, and no matter how unleaflike they may be now in their stiffness, respect the motif of the design enough to be sure to let them grow up and not down. The general rule in the selection of natural and conventional designs is to carve the more conspicuous parts in natural designs, making them faithful studies from nature, and using conventional designs for margins, mouldings, and subordinate parts of the article of furniture which is being decorated. In a picture-frame, the top and side rails should be more heavily carved than the lower rail, and if bosses or brackets are added they also will be most effective in deep relief. Mass the carving, and remember there must be plain spaces to rest the eye.

CALISTA HALSEY PATCHIN.

HINTS FOR THE HALL AND STAIRCASE.

THE floors of the entrance halls of our ordinary houses are, as a rule, either boarded or flagged, and are usually covered with oilcloth or linoleum, which soon becomes shabby and wears out. The dust and dirt also collect underneath.

In the first case, the boards may be taken up and the floor filled in between the joists with concrete and tiling, or marble mosaic laid therein, always forming, if possible, a sunk space for the mat. Broad masses of plain tiles, four inches or six inches square, of either red, gray, or buff, are always more satisfactory than elaborate patterns, and have the advantage of being cheaper and also less liable to get loose, for it must be remembered that a tile floor laid upon joists in this way is never so lasting as when laid upon a solid foundation. In the second case the margins of the flags may be painted a good warm color, or a border of incised lines may be cut and filled in with colored cements. Sometimes the flags are laid in squares placed diagonally; in a case of this sort, a good effect may be produced, at no very great expense, by filling in the joints with colored cement, and placing a small red or black tile in the corner of each flag, which, of course, must be cut out to receive it.

The walls may be painted, for two thirds of their height, a neutral color, not light enough to show fingermarks, and, if it is not intended to have many pictures, a little simple stencilling may be done in a darker shade of color.

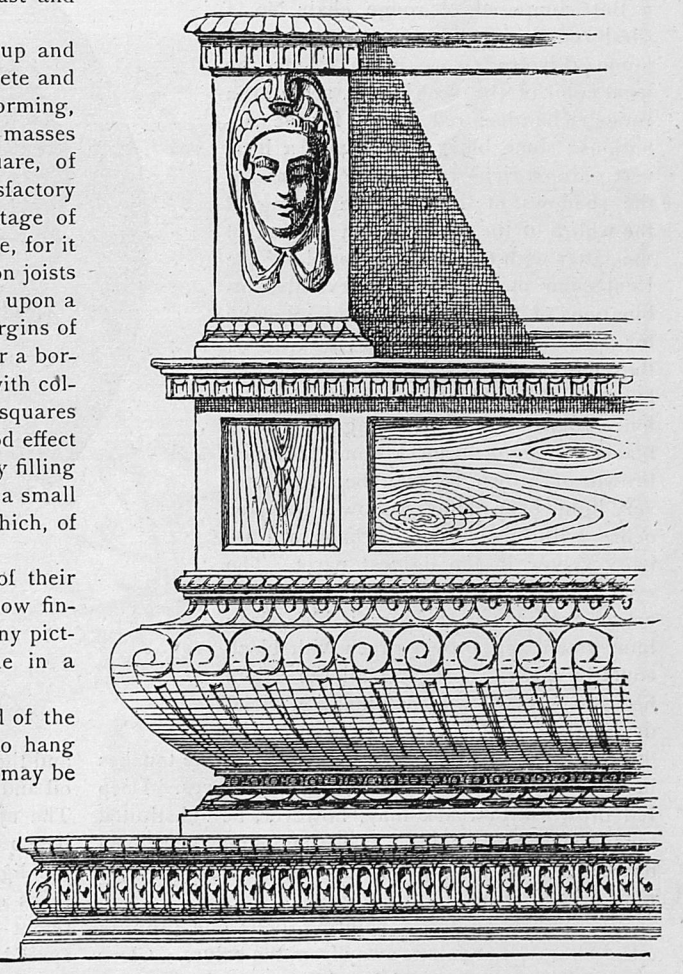
Dividing this portion from the upper third of the wall, which may be called the frieze, a rail to hang the pictures from, or a small shelf for china, may be placed. Of course it would be necessary to plug the walls for the rail or shelf, and as this increases the expense and injures the plastering, and the patching rendered necessary thereby usually shows through the painting, sooner or later, it will be found better to adopt the simpler plan of fixing a half-inch iron gas pipe, with ornamental holdfasts which can be driven in between the bricks; this will serve the double purpose of picture rod and mould for dividing the upper portion of the wall from the lower.

The upper third of the wall may be painted a lighter tint of the color than that below, and, as it is likely to get dirty very soon where gas is much used, it might be painted in distemper, which could easily be washed off and re-done when required. For this reason, it would not be advisable to do anything elaborate, such as animal or figure painting, but, instead, a simple stencil pattern or border in distemper, with panels at intervals, in which figure tiles might be placed, let in flush with the face of the plaster, would be both effective and comparatively inexpensive.

The staircase, as a rule, in most of our ordinary houses is such a wretched affair that it is difficult to know what to do with it. If it happens to form portion of the entrance hall, then the same scheme of decoration must be continued. If it is distinct from the entrance hall, the walls may have a painted dado of a somewhat darker tint than those in the entrance hall, with stencilling in a lighter color upon it, and finished with a dado mould corresponding in height to the hand-rail. The wood-work, as a rule, is so meagre and bad that it had better be painted a quiet warm tone of red or brown, in order to attract as little notice as possible; the margins of the stairs may also be treated in the same way. The walls may be stencilled in order to form panels or frames for pictures, and a deep frieze, with a bold stencil ornament, will go a long way to improve what is generally the dreariest portion of this class of house.

DR. DRESSER ON FURNITURE.

BEFORE all other considerations comes that of utility; and, in order that any piece of furniture be well designed, it is necessary that the designer have a clear appreciation of the object which the work is to serve, though to this he is too often indifferent.



CARVED BENCH IN THE BARGELLO AT FLORENCE.

Supposing a seat is to be formed, the question arises, is it to be merely something to sit upon—a stool? or is a back-rest, as well as a seat, required—in other words, a chair? Is it to be a seat for one person only (a stool or chair), or for two or more—such as a settee? or is it to serve as a seat and something to lie upon—as, for example, a couch or sofa?

Whatever be the object we are about to produce, we must first ascertain, with exactness, the want which is to be met, and then seek to meet that want in the most perfect manner. If we are to make a seat

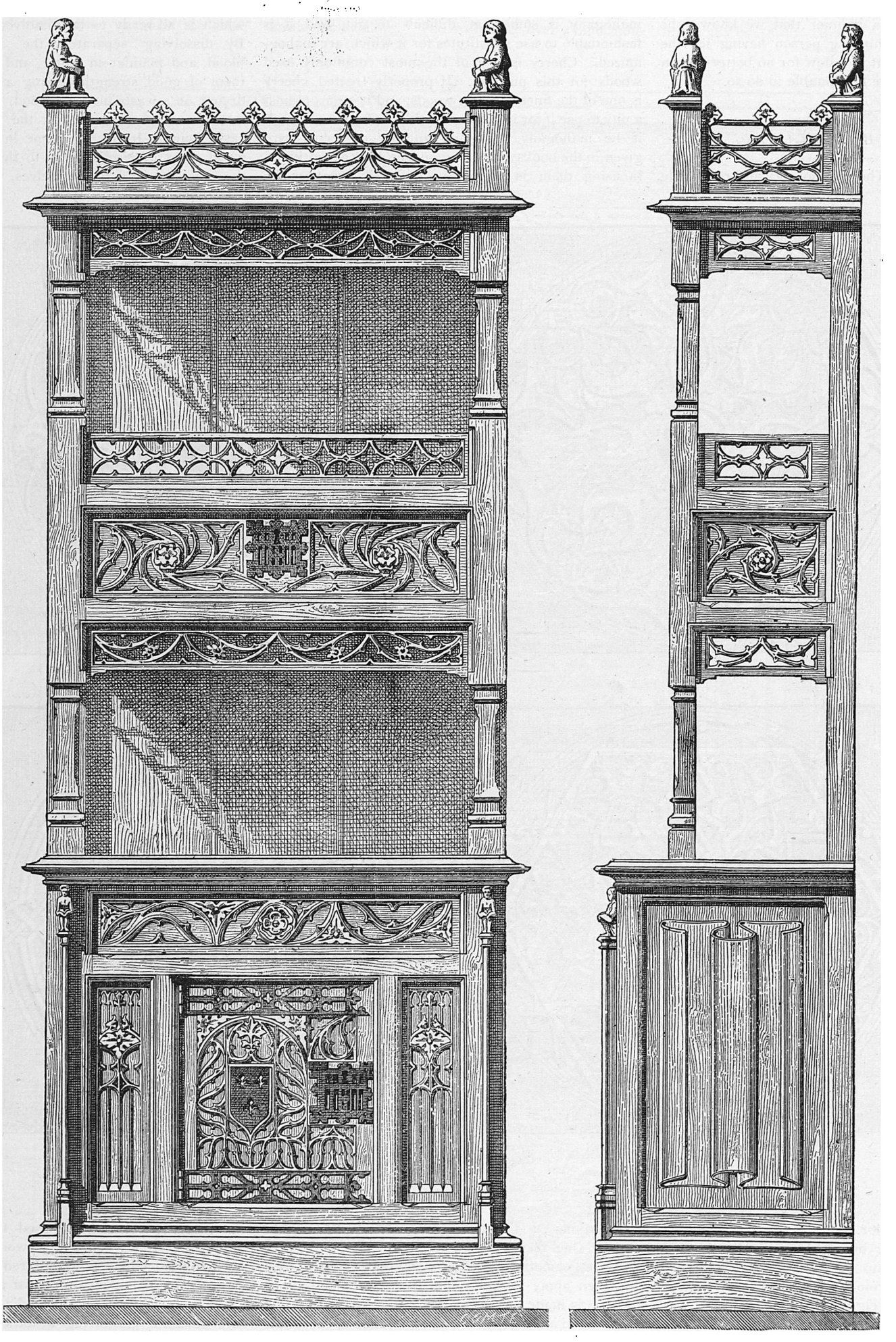
with a back-rest we should know beforehand whether it is to be used when we work at a table, or whether it is to be merely a something to take our rest upon.

A chair, for example, is a seat with a back-rest; it is obvious, therefore, that in designing a chair we must form the back so that it will really give rest to the back. We have seen many chair-backs so shaped that they cannot be used, without much discomfort, and so stuffed that the cushioned part is exactly where the back can never touch it; such absurdities are certainly inexcusable. There can be no difficulty about a writing or a dining chair, but there is so much difference of opinion about what constitutes "ease" in a chair, that the designer may be excused if he makes an "easy" chair which does not seem easy to some persons. As one person likes sweets, while another cannot eat them, and as one may prefer port while a second drinks hock, so some would give preference to one variety of seat, and regard it as an easy chair, and some to another. What gives comfort to one person does not necessarily do so to another: one likes a high chair, another a low one; one prefers a chair with a back that is high, another with a back that is low; one selects a chair with hard, another with soft, stuffing, and so on; and it is even doubtful whether any chair is really easy to the same person for any length of time.

For this reason we recommend that drawing-rooms should be furnished with chairs of a variety of patterns, and not with a number of duplicates of the same design. The system of furnishing with twelve small chairs, all of which are alike, and with one lady's and one gentleman's easy-chair, is absurd, for in the matter of appearance as well as comfort we gain by variety.

Having taken into consideration the usefulness of the article to be constructed, and having chosen the most befitting form for it, we proceed to notice, secondly, the nature of the material of which the furniture is to be made.

Nearly all our furniture, and, perhaps, all our good furniture, is made of wood. Wood is a substance consisting of cells and vessels, the former being delicate, bladder-like bodies which can easily be injured, and the latter elongated, toughened fibres which constitute the firmer parts of the wood. The vessels always run throughout the length of a tree, and never radiate from the centre to the circumference; thus wood has what we call a "grain," and is necessarily stronger in one direction than in another. It can also be cleft or split in the direction of the grain—that is, in the direction in which the vessels run—but not across the grain or through the vessels. As we have to consider, thirdly, the simplest, best, and most economical method of using the material at our disposal when we are about to form any pieces of furniture, and as we use wood for the construction of such articles, the question of "grain" in wood requires careful consideration.



CREDENCE IN CARVED WOOD.

FRENCH WORK OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

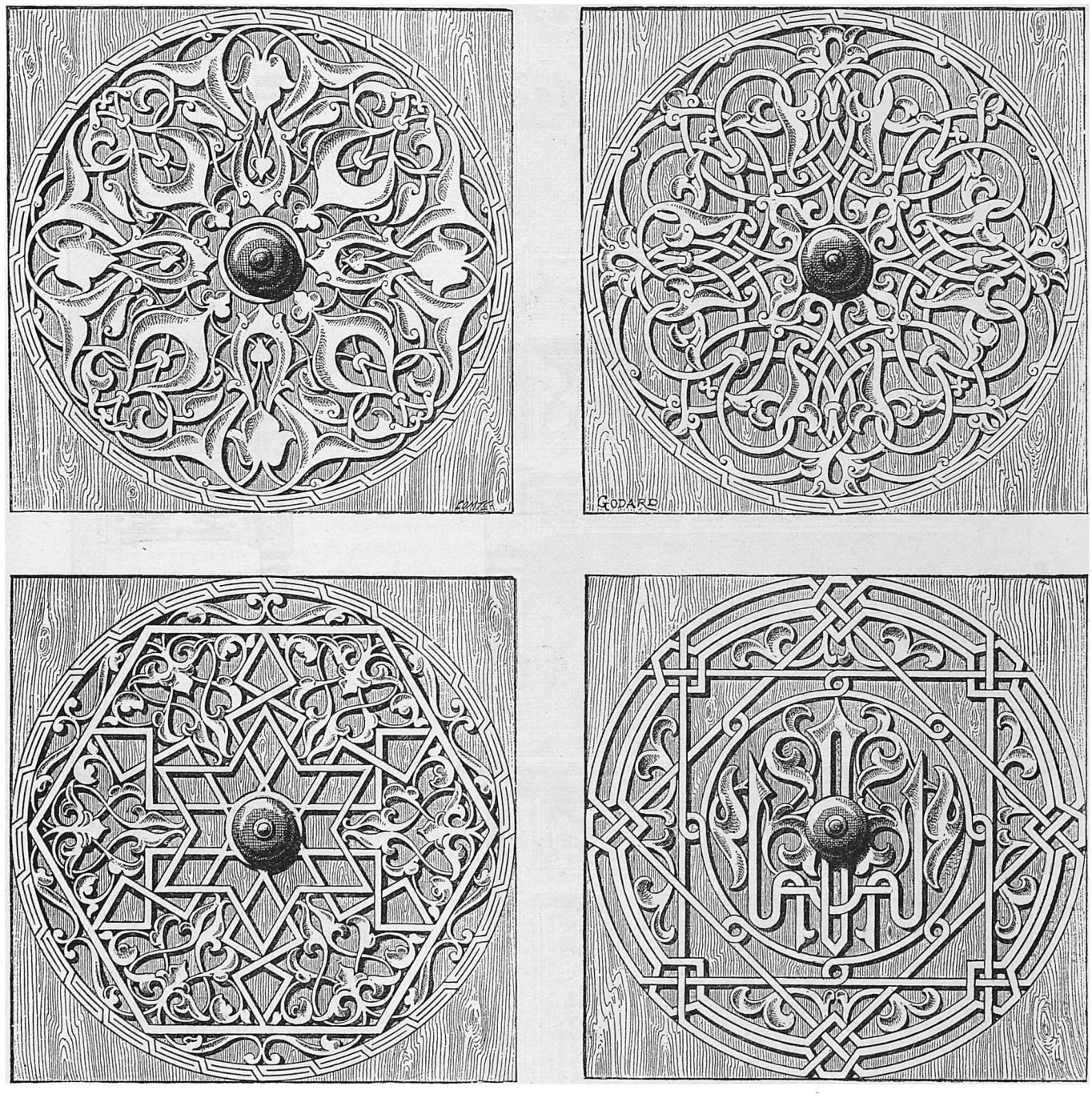
If wood is cut with the grain it is comparatively strong, and if against the grain it is comparatively weak, and a piece of wood which would be, if cut with the grain, sufficiently strong for the leg of a useful chair, would prove altogether useless as a chair leg if cut across the grain; indeed, with many woods the leg would have to be four times the thickness if cut across the grain that would be required were it cut in the direction of the "vessels" of the tree-stem. In order, then, that we may use the wood in the simplest, best, and most economical manner, it is necessary that we cut it in the direction of the grain, and use it as far as possible in straight pieces.

Yet, how frequently do we find chairs with bowed legs—legs cut against the grain! Such legs have grown in favor recently, since abortions of this character were general in the days of Queen Anne, and this Queen Anne revival has brought them again into use. Man is a creature endowed with reason, and it is reason that makes him nobler than the brute; yet he constantly acts as though he possessed no powers by which he can discriminate between right and

wrong. Reason at once tells us that it is absurd to waste wood, and that it is stupid not to use it in such a manner as will give to our seats strength and durability, especially when this happens to be the cheapest method of working the material, and when no beauty is gained by any departure from what is obviously right. Yet, in direct opposition to the dictates of reason, we copy ugly chairs from a bygone age, which are formed in a manner that we know to be wrong; and some unthinking person having led the way, others are content to follow for no better reason than that it is said to be fashionable to do so.

NOTES ON WOOD-STAINING.

IN an old volume of The (London) Furniture Gazette we find some valuable suggestions in regard to wood-staining. The writer divides the subject into two classes—the staining or dyeing proper, and a sort of painting in which the coloring matter, in a liquid state, partially penetrates the pores of the wood and is held by them. Dyeing colors the fibres to a greater or less depth, in the same manner as the fabrics are colored by the deposition of a coating of coloring matter in and upon them, and occasionally by actually changing the colors of the fibres themselves. In staining, the pigment usually penetrates but a little way into the wood, and a scratch or abrasion of the surface will show the natural color. In dyeing, the coloring matter can usually be made to stain the fibres for some little distance into the body of the wood, and thus a more durable color is effected. In the case of veneers, not over an eighth of an inch thick, it is possible, by careful manipulation, to produce a tolerably even color throughout the wood. In general, wood can be colored in almost any desired tint, from red rose, through the blues, to dark black. Most of the bright colors, however, are liable to fade.



CARVED WOOD PANELS.

ARABIC WORK OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

At the present time it is often convenient to imitate the color of some precious wood upon one less costly. Thus we may, upon cherry or maple, imitate rosewood or ebony. Ebony, in fact, can be imitated upon a great variety of woods; the method of producing the color, however, must be varied for the different kinds. Books of recipes are filled with instructions for producing black walnut stains and dyeing woods to imitate black walnut. A more useless or senseless practice could hardly be imagined, for black walnut is really the last wood in the world which one would wish to imitate. Its color is bad, and its only recommendation is that it is easily worked, and is considerably harder than pine.

At the present time, says a writer in Carpentry, mahogany is somewhat difficult to get, and it is fashionable to use substitutes for it which are mahoganized. Cherry is one of the most commonly used woods for this purpose. If properly treated, cherry is one of the finest cabinet woods, and it seems almost a pity to use it for imitating anything else, even though it be mahogany. A great number of recipes are given in the books for mahoganizing, but the workman in using them is usually in the dark, because no explanations of the reasons for the directions are given. One recipe says, after getting the surface of the wood smooth, rub with a solution of nitric acid and then apply a solution of dragon's blood. The solution is made by dissolving one ounce in a pint of alcohol and adding one third of an ounce of carbonate of soda or common washing-soda. Sulphuric acid will answer just as well. Its office is to darken the wood and prepare it for receiving the dye, which is the dragon's blood. His own experiments lead the writer to believe that the only advantage of the washing-soda is to neutralize any of the acid which may remain behind. Another recipe calls for the acid treatment of the wood first, which is then followed by a liquid made with two ounces of logwood, eight ounces of madder, one ounce of fustic and one gallon of water. This is boiled two hours, and then applied to the wood. Unfortunately, there are no recipes, so far as we know, which give directions for using logwood, dragon's blood, and madder, in the shape in which they are found in the shop. For example, instead of logwood in chips, it is much more convenient to buy a little four-ounce box of the extract of logwood, and instead of the madder coming in the old form, it can now be obtained in the form of a solid, which is all ready to be dissolved in boiling water. By dissolving separately the logwood, dragon's blood, and madder in water, and then, after getting them of good strength, mixing a little of each and drying on a waste piece of wood, the proper proportions necessary to get just the color desired are easily found. It must be borne in mind that the logwood gives a purplish tone to the mixture, and that the others, if kept to themselves, will only produce a yellow. The stain, when put upon cherry without an acid being previously applied, will give a sort of dirty yellowish brown. If the acid is added afterward, the red will speedily make its appearance. Besides producing the red color, the acid has another effect, which is valuable in imitating old and dark mahogany—it darkens the wood very materially. The greatest amount of darkening can be obtained by brushing the wood with the weak acid and then warming it The heat intensifies the action of the acid, but if too long continued it is possible to scorch the surface, making it look as though a hot iron had passed over it. Indeed, acid may be used for staining almost any wood a dark brown. It would be possible, by a combination of yellow and red stains, to produce the color of mahogany on almost any of our common woods. In Dick's Encyclopædia are the following directions for producing a dark mahogany color: "Boil half a pound of madder and two ounces of logwood in a gallon of water; apply with a brush while the liquid is hot; when dry, go over the whole with a solution of pearlash made of two drachms of pearlash to a quart of water." There is some doubt as to the action of this solution on cherry, though it might act well enough on other woods. Permanganate of potash is often mentioned as being a good material for imitating certain kinds of wood. It comes in the form of crystals, which are readily dissolved in water. When put upon the wood it pen-